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SUBJECT: OAS AMB. VALERO NAMED MFA VICE MINISTER FOR NORTH AMERICA

REF: CARACAS 002626

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Classified By: COUNSELOR FOR POLITICAL AFFAIRS ROBERT DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary. The BRV announced on September 5 that Jorge Valero, Venezuela's Ambassador to the OAS, will be the new MFA Vice Minister for North America. Valero replaces the self-professed Bolivarian "revolutionary" Mary Pili Hernandez. USOAS will have more up-to-date impressions of Valero, but the general view from Caracas is that Valero is unconditionally loyal to Chavez and an experienced as well as opportunistic BRV aparatchik. He is likely to be as, if not more, hard-line as his predecessor. As of September 5 the MFA's North America Office was still planning what will likely be a quick transition to enable Valero to accompany President Chavez on his upcoming trip to the UN General Assembly and possibly to the NAM Summit in Havana on September 11 (Note: Chavez has not yet confirmed his participation in the latter, according to the MFA). End Summary.

Shake-Up at the MFA

12. (C) Venezuelan Ambassador to the OAS Juan Valero was officially named new MFA Vice Minister for North America on September 5. National Assembly Deputy Calixto Ortega told PolCouns September 8 that new Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro worked well with Valero during Maduro's Washington visits over the last few years. He replaces high profile journalist Mary Pili Hernandez, who in her August 28 meeting with visiting Senior Coordinator for Venezuela insinuated that anyone coming behind her would be even more hard-line. MFA Director for North America Yaneth Arocha (Protect) told poloff that it is still unclear what, if any, responsibilities the BRV will give to Hernandez. According to at least one local newspaper, Hernandez will stay on as an advisor to the MFA.

13. (C) Arocha said it is also not yet clear when Valero will take up his new position. She believed new Foreign Minister Maduro wanted to have Valero in place in time to participate in the NAM Summit in Havana starting September 11 and to accompany President Chavez when he speaks at the UN General

Assembly on September 20. MFA Director for Multilateral Affairs Ilenia Medina, however, told poloff September 6 that it is still not clear whether Chavez will participate in the NAM Summit. The pro-government newspaper "VEA" reported September 5 that Chavez will not attend the NAM Summit. Arocha suggested that Valero may be available for courtesy calls from embassies later in September, after the upcoming travel and a series of internal BRV office calls.

14. (U) Valero's designation is just one of a number of changes Foreign Minister Maduro is making in the top ranks of the MFA less than one month after he became Foreign Minister.

Ambassador to Italy Rodrigo Chavez (no relation to the president) has been tapped to replace Jenny Figueroa as Vice Minister for Europe, and parliamentarian Rodolfo Sanz is slated to replace Alcides Rondon as Vice Minister for Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, Ambassador to Iran Arturo Anibal Gallegos will reportedly soon be named the new Vice Minister for the Middle East and Asia.

Bio Data

15. (SBU) Valero has served as Venezuela's Ambassador to the OAS for over four years and has staunchly defended the Chavez government there during the short-lived 2002 coup, the recall referendum, and more recently during an OAS debate about Venezuelan interference in Peru's elections. He attracted local headlines in 2004 by using the OAS as a platform to make false accusations about purported U.S. violations of Venezuelan sovereignty. Valero took specific aim at the democracy promotion programs of USAID and the National Endowment of Democracy, arguing that such programs support "anti-democratic activities of the opposition."

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16. (U) Prior to becoming Ambassador to the OAS, Valero served as President of the Latin American Parliament's Social Debt Commission. He has reportedly served diplomatic stints as an MFA Vice Minister before (Note: when the MFA had only one Vice Minister, not five), as well as Ambassador to South Korea. Valero was a member of the National Congress from 1994 to 1999 from the left-wing MAS Party. He served as a member of the National Border Council (1994-1995) and was International Relations Secretary of the MAS Party (1993-95).

17. (U) Valero was a professor of history at Los Andes University and at the Venezuelan Central University. He has a Master's Degree in Latin American Studies from London University and a BA in History from Los Andes University. He is the author of "International Diplomacy and the Coup of 1945." The new Vice Minister for North America hails from Valencia in the western state of Trujillo. On November 8, Valero will turn sixty.

WHITAKER